

## 16th Chapter of the Abbot General OCist for the MFC - 12.09.2013

Now that we have seen and, I hope, reflected on the meaning of the expression "the work of God" with which St. Benedict defines the community liturgy, we will better understand what it means to live it according to the Rule of Saint Benedict as our monastic life's center of radiation.

What the Psalms, the whole of Scripture, as well as the Church's tradition on the work of God in our midst tell us, obviously challenge our faith. It is faith that recognizes that God is creating beings, that God works the salvation of his people, that God gives us filial adoption in the Holy Spirit in the paschal sacrifice of the Son. Without faith, all of this would be a fairy tale; we would not perceive it as a reality, a reality more real than that which we only perceive with our senses and our reason. It is good to remember this fact in this "Year of Faith", and the encyclical *Lumen fidei*, which I quoted last week, is worth further in-depth study by each of us and in our communities.

The Rule speaks very little about faith or "believing" in the sense of faith, but what it says is significant. In the Prologue, faith is mentioned twice, and both times they are used in a context in which faith is put in relation to life.

In verse 21 we read, " Having our loins girded, therefore, with faith and the performance of good works, let us walk in the path (of the Lord) under the guidance of the Gospel, so that we may deserve to see Him who has called us to His kingdom" (RB Prol. 21).

And at the end of the Prologue we read: "As we advance in the religious life and in faith, we shall run the way of God's commandments with our hearts expanded from unspeakable sweetness of love. Thus, never departing from his teachings and persevering in the monastery in His doctrine until death, we may by patience share in the sufferings of Christ and deserve to have a share also in His kingdom." (Prol. 49)

In these two passages in the Prologue, the context is that of a way of following Christ who calls us to follow him until we are with Him in His Kingdom. The monastic life, the *conversatio*, life in the monastery, is basically this path that we follow with all our life and for all our life, enlightened and guided by the Lord who speaks to us in the Gospel, with his commandments, with his doctrine, his "*magisterium*", his word as Teacher. Faith is the attention and trust that our freedom grants to this offer, to this light, to this way. But the attention and trust are real if we ourselves exercise them completely, with our whole lives, with our behavior, that in this way progresses together with faith towards the fullness that only God can give us, the fullness of our total communion with Him in His Kingdom.

Our heart expands, that is, our inner vitality expands, to the extent that between our life and faith there is a reciprocal stimulus to progress, to make a journey following Christ. Without faith, life would not have the light needed to know where to go to progress, to improve, to grow, that is, it would not see the Lord and what He gives us to follow him towards the Kingdom. But also faith, without a life on the move, without the journey of a life made up of meetings, works, choices, experiences, etc., would be like an ornamental, aesthetic light, but not a light indicating the path to take. It would not be incarnated in a life.

For this reason, St. Benedict offers us a form of life that puts faith in touch with a path, with an experience of life, through which faith and life can cooperate, interact, in order to move forward. For the Christian life to be a path, it is necessary to always put the beacon that sheds light in relationship with a body in movement, otherwise the beacon only illuminates a vacuum, or the movement of the body, with no light, is lost in the dark.

I say this because this is what also needs to be verified concerning the work of God that St. Benedict puts at the center of monastic life. The center is a light that faith identifies and allows us to see. It is faith that allows us to see that God is at work among us, that he saves us and makes us his children. But this recognition of the work of God which faith allows us, if it does not radiate out from the center into life, if it does not accompany us in the various circles of human and monastic life, it could become a dead center, an extinguished center that does not radiate. A light that does not radiate, is turned off, it is no longer a light. If in the celebration of the work of God, I recognize and obtain through faith the awareness of being a child of God in Christ in the Holy Spirit, but then I do not carry this awareness into my life, if I do not live this reality in my life, in all aspects of my life, this truth becomes, as if it were, extinguished, as if it had become less real, it has lost its reality. It would remain true in itself, in God, but not true for me. What would it serve to know that God makes us his children if this is not expressed in life, if we do not live this reality, if this truth does not transform at least a little of our lives, if it is not experienced?

The work of God that we celebrate in the liturgy must be radiated to be experienced, and it must be experienced to be radiated.

There is a word that is used in the Rule that can help us understand what all this means. This word always seemed strange to me until I better understood everything that we have seen so far about what St. Benedict means by "the work of God." This word is: "*operarius* – worker".

Until recently, this word bothered me, because it seemed a bit pejorative. I always thought Benedict chose an unfortunate term when I read in the Rule's Prologue that God searches for "his worker - *operarium suum*" in the multitude of the people to whom he cries out: " Who is the one who will have life, and desires to see good days?"

(See Prol. 14-15). I would have preferred the term "servant", which is more biblical, or simply the word "man" or just "someone". The idea of "worker" for me implied that of "a master", and if God is looking for workers, and if the workers are "his", it would mean that he is a master, ... a "bourgeois". In this understanding one can see the influence of modern ideologies up until 1968. It was an epidermal impression, and moreover not very intelligent, as St. Benedict had used this term a millennium and a half before the industrial revolution and the workers' struggles.

While I was meditating on God's work, I suddenly realized that the *operarius* is literally "one who works," who does a work. We could also translate this word with "operator". If St. Benedict has used this term it is precisely in reference to the *Opus Dei*. God is looking for "his workers" in the sense that he is looking for men and women who will do His work, and incarnate the work of God. So now I'm almost sorry that Benedict only uses this term three times, even if each of them is meaningful, as we will see tomorrow.

*Fr Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori OCist*